

# “The Father-Son Relationship of Amasa and Francis Marion Lyman”

August 11, 2018

(Elder Snow in Fillmore)

## Introduction

I have learned a lot about Amasa Lyman in preparation for this event. I learned about his impressive record of Church service dating back to his baptism in 1832. Most of you probably know about the time Amasa risked his life and disguised himself during the Missouri conflict to discover non-Mormon plans against the Saints. And the time he was imprisoned in Richmond Jail with the Prophet Joseph Smith. And how he served 18 missions – one with Zerubbabel, participated in the Zion’s Camp expedition, and raised funds for the construction of the Nauvoo Temple. We know about his call to the Quorum of the Twelve as the “thirteenth apostle,” his appointment as a counselor in the First Presidency, and his participation in the Council of Fifty. We know about his effort to reign in the wayward Saints that broke from the Church to establish a colony in the Dakotas. He then captained several wagon companies into the Salt Lake Valley. He sacrificed much in directing the Church’s colonization efforts in San Bernardino, California, presided over the European Mission, and helped establish the city of Fillmore. We also know about his eventual separation from the Church later in his life. He was neither the first nor the last Church leader to fall away.

Amasa was a complex individual who is the subject of several books, dozens of articles, and even a documentary film. I’ve thought about what I can add to this breadth of scholarship, especially in front of a gathering of Lyman descendants. In reviewing Amasa’s eventful life, something that caught my attention is the relationship between him and his son Francis Marion, both of whom served as members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Amasa and his son, who preferred to be called Marion, shared an exceptionally strong bond that was thoroughly tried and tested over the years. They harvested their crops and tended their fields together in Fillmore, jointly managed a sawmill, and shared the pulpit on more than one Sunday worship service. Amasa was Marion’s role model and childhood hero. Marion was Amasa’s pride and joy. When Amasa was disfellowshipped and later excommunicated from the Church, their bond was challenged like never before and nearly fractured, but it somehow endured. Today I’d like to review the relationship of Amasa and Marion during this turbulent time. I think there are important lessons we can all learn from this episode, not the least of which is the love of family and patience in the Lord’s timing.

## Disfellowship

Amasa’s separation from the Church began when he delivered his now infamous sermon in Dundee, Scotland, in March 1862, which downplayed the divinity of Jesus Christ, the need of a Savior, and the validity of the Atonement. Even though Amasa’s “Dundee speech” was published in the *Millennial Star* at the time it was given, it wasn’t until five years later in January 1867 when he was called to explain his views before the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Despite issuing a public apology and repudiation of his teachings, Amasa continued to publicly share his unorthodox views of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in Beaver and Fillmore. When complaints reached Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, Brigham Young promptly called another meeting of the First Presidency and the Twelve. Amasa was disfellowshipped, removed from the Twelve, and had his priesthood withdrawn.

As you can imagine, Amasa's son Marion was deeply saddened by his father's disfellowshippment from the Church. He wrote, "It seemed my heart was never before pierced with such sorrow and deep trouble. . . . It cut me to the heart."<sup>1</sup> While Marion trembled for his father's sake, he kept hope that Amasa would ultimately regain his footing and find his way back to full activity in the Church. Marion wrote, "I hoped he would come around all right, as long as he was not excommunicated from the Church."<sup>2</sup>

While Amasa had not yet been excommunicated from the Church, he found himself in a hostile environment in Fillmore. He had been a pillar in the LDS community and a well-respected Church leader. His personal relationship with the Prophet Joseph Smith and his connection to the early Restoration gained him influence, stature, and prestige in the eyes of his neighbors and fellow Saints. Now Amasa was disfellowshipped, peers and neighbors monitored his actions suspiciously. While there is no record of Amasa's reaction to the Church's disciplinary action, he doesn't appear to have been combative or indignant. He quietly went about his business, kept his religious ideas to himself, and devoted more time to family, his orchards, and sawmill. After his disciplinary council, many of his journal entries read, "I spent the day on the sawmill," suggesting a turn away from his study of controversial topics and teachings.<sup>3</sup>

When Amasa was disfellowshipped, his son Marion found himself in an equally uncomfortable situation. Some Latter-day Saints wondered how Marion could possibly reconcile his faith with his wayward father. Would he have to choose between family and the Church? Marion later wrote, "I was now placed in a very awkward position, for all the Saints would naturally look at me inquisitively, if not suspiciously, to know where I would stand on the question of father's troubles. Those who knew my heart felt satisfied I would go straight. . . . Others looked for me early to show signs of being tainted or tarred with the same brush [as my father]."<sup>4</sup> This was a trying time for a still impressionable twenty-six-year-old. Marion called the months following his father's disfellowship "a painful experience." There was a literal tug-of-war within the family, where some of Marion's "aunts" (his father's plural wives) and half-siblings sympathized with Amasa, while others wholeheartedly denounced the false teachings.

But Marion felt he needed to prove to his father his loyalty to the Church. He wrote, "Although I love my father with an undying love and devotion, I could not swallow his false doctrines, for they had no ring of truth to me. . . . I took the straightforward course and was as pronounced as was necessary so that my words could be relied upon and all my immediate friends and acquaintances soon knew my position."<sup>5</sup>

Despite publicly declaring his loyalty to the Church, Marion was uncertain about how he would be received by Brigham Young after he was summoned to his office while in Salt Lake City for a legislative meeting. "The President sat in his great chair," Marion wrote, "with his back to the north. President Daniel H. Wells and George Q. Cannon sat opposite him south of the round center table. Facing the President, I took Brother Wells by the hand first and then Brother Cannon, when he gave me a peculiar motion with his hand, which I understood to mean, 'Go right up to the President first.'" There certainly seemed to be an ominous feeling in the room. You might imagine how nervous Marion was to meet President Young so soon after his father was removed from the Quorum of the Twelve. But Marion's fears proved to be unfounded. He continued, "I heeded the intimation, and the President shook me heartily up to the elbow. Thus the ice was broken . . . and we ever after understood each other. Brothers Kimball, Wells, and all the apostles were as good and kind to me as they could be." While the community in Fillmore

might continue to watch him suspiciously, Marion felt reassured that Church leaders knew where he stood.

Over the next several years following his disfellowshipment, Amasa and Marion learned to co-exist in Fillmore. They shared interest in a sawmill, and as business increased the two of them opened another mill, working together to dam the nearby river, improve the millrace, and install new machinery. They also tended cattle, planted crops, and managed a large orchard. Even after Marion was appointed to different county positions, including county attorney, county recorder, and superintendent of schools, the two maintained regular contact and supported one another in their individual endeavors.

### **Excommunication**

About a year and a half after Amasa was disfellowshipped, he began attending church services in the Fillmore Ward. He attended sacrament meeting for the first time since being disfellowshipped in November 1868, and Bishop Thomas Callister even invited him to speak. He said, "I can truly say, my brethren and sisters, it gives me pleasure to meet you once again. . . . The value of the gospel to me is increasing every day. I have proved that it is true and good, and I am pleased and satisfied with it, and I am determined to live in this work and my chief desire is to keep my connection with it unbroken. . . . My feelings are and have been to stay with this people." He continued, "The gospel provides me all the blessing I enjoy. I love it, because it is pure and holy. For this reason, I expect to live with you, and when my wearied mortality shall find rest in the grave, it shall be with the Latter-day Saints."<sup>6</sup> Amasa's short testimony thrilled his son Marion. It looked as though his father was making an honest effort at restitution and in returning to the Church.

Over the ensuing months, things seemed to be going well for Amasa. He continued to attend church meetings and spoke or shared his testimony from time to time. General Authorities passing through central Utah visited their old friend and former colleague. While in Salt Lake City in the fall of 1869, Amasa attended services in the Old Tabernacle on Temple Square and listened to talks given by returned missionaries from Europe, including his son Platte Lyman. The next day he received a personal invitation from President Brigham Young to dine together, which he accepted. His attendance at all of these meetings and his warm reception by Latter-day Saints appeared to be a positive sign of Amasa's progress and hopeful return to the fold. Amasa's son-in-law William Clayton wrote, "You have many true and sincere friends who will never forget you, especially while you continue to follow the course you are doing and have done. By your wise policy, your friends rejoice while your foes are defeated."<sup>7</sup>

But just days after dining with Brigham Young, Amasa lodged with William Godbe, the former Latter-day Saint who would become one of the most relentless critics of the Church. Amasa had been meeting and corresponding with Godbe for months. The details of their letters have been lost to history, but no doubt they discussed what was being called the "New Movement," a religious organization that openly opposed the Church. The followers of the New Movement, also called the Church of Zion, and later referred to as the Godbeites, were drawn to spiritualism, and they attended seances and invited notable mediums to lecture in Salt Lake City. It was well known that the Godbeites were looking for a leader to legitimize the New Movement, preferably someone with close ties to Joseph Smith and the early Restoration period. They saw Amasa as the perfect fit and likely invited him to lead the New Movement in the fall of 1869. Amasa remained undecided about the New Movement and continued attending LDS meetings

for months. But after a disagreement over doctrine in a School of the Prophets meeting in March 1870, he decided to cast his lot with the Godbeites where he could preach unfiltered and unrestrained.

In May 1870, Amasa informed Marion of his decision to join the New Movement. The announcement devastated Marion, and he wrote, “Father took his departure from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the final step to break his family into fragments and turned his back upon his tens of thousands of warm-hearted and devoted friends and placed himself into the ranks of the common enemy, as one of the world arrayed against the Church and kingdom of God on the earth.”<sup>8</sup> The next day, rather than returning to Fillmore with his son and family, Amasa told Marion he would remain in Salt Lake City and preach with the Godbeites. Marion wrote, “I was broken hearted and speechless, but where I could sufficiently recover my presence of mind I remonstrated [pled] with him with my eyes full of tears and all to no purpose. My heart was too sore for argument. I parted with him thus and took [my wife] Rhoda upstairs . . . where we wept together for hours.” If that wasn’t enough description of Marion’s disappointment and heartache, he also wrote, “Father’s death would have been a pleasure compared with what we suffered at this terrible announcement.”<sup>9</sup>

Just before returning to Fillmore, Marion made one last effort to persuade his father to change course and mustered the courage to challenge his father. He wrote, “I told him I felt he was tearing himself from his family and the Church and that he would now go to work to destroy what he had been so long building up. . . . I told him if he was taking the right course it would not rend our hearts, but make us rejoice. But he was distracting and destroying us and tearing down the work of his lifetime. I told him my heart was sorrowful and broken and bleeding. His answer was, ‘You can’t feel anymore sorrowful for me than I do for you.’” The only thing Amasa himself wrote of the confrontation was, “It gave [Marion] much pain.”<sup>10</sup>

But just when it seemed like their relationship was being irreparably torn apart, Marion wrote, “Father asked a promise of me . . . that I would always be his friend.” This was a rare emotional moment for Amasa, who clearly held a deep affection for his son and hoped the two of them could see beyond their religious differences. It was as if Amasa was extending an olive branch, and Marion accepted. He wrote, “I agreed [to remain friends] and sacredly kept that agreement.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Aftermath**

Marion accurately predicted division and discord in the family in the aftermath of Amasa’s excommunication. Three of Amasa’s seven wives divorced him, while three others remained married to him but felt abandoned and isolated. Only his first wife, Louisa Maria, remained loyal to Amasa. His daughter, Maria Louisa, felt as though she was forced to choose between the Church and her father and ultimately divorced her husband William Clayton, remaining loyal to her father. One other son and two other daughters also stuck by their father and joined the Godbeites.

While Marion stayed true to the LDS Church, he kept his promise and continued to be his father’s friend. He confided in Amasa on family and work-related matters, making it a point to keep each other in their lives. When Marion later served as a missionary in Europe, he would stay up late writing to his father, signing each letter with “I remain your son affectionately.”<sup>12</sup> He was also not bashful in bearing his testimony to his wayward father. In one letter, Marion wrote, “The Lord helps me in a miraculous manner in my efforts to teach the principles of life and

salvation. I have had many dreams about you and Ma and I long for the time to come where we shall meet again, for home is the best place on earth, although I will leave it with all its endearments cheerfully to do the will of God. The kingdom of God is first with me and then comes family and business and pleasures.”<sup>13</sup>

## **Death**

Over the next several years, the New Movement fizzled, the Godbeites were scattered, and Amasa quietly continued to practice spiritualism in Fillmore. On February 1, 1877, Amasa became confined to his bed with a severe illness—either pneumonia or heart failure. At this desperate hour, he summoned his son Marion to his side and asked him to remain with him. Family tradition holds that when Marion asked for how long, his father replied, “Forever.” Over the ensuing days, Amasa bequeathed his gold watch to his son as a keepsake, while Marion lovingly sat by his father’s bedside clasping hands until his final breath on February 4, 1877.<sup>14</sup>

## **Rebaptism**

After Amasa’s death, Marion took it upon himself to keep the memory of his father alive. Following the funeral, he quickly obtained his father’s extensive set of forty-three volumes of journals that dated back to the earliest days of the Restoration, and he protected them from falling into the hands of other family members who might not have cared for them. They were a treasure to Marion, who referenced them often and copied large excerpts into his own journal.

Three years later in 1880, Marion was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, following in his father’s footsteps. Sometime after his call, he donated his father’s journals to the Church, knowing that they carried significant historical value and belonged with other Church records.

It was also sometime after his call as an Apostle that Marion was reminded of a letter his father had written years earlier when Marion was only fifteen years old and his father was still a faithful Church leader. The letter stated, “Remember, my son, that not only yours alone, but the hope and interest of your father’s house, hang upon you and your conduct in the future.” Marion had forgotten about the letter, but it brought new meaning to him as a member of the Twelve. It was as if his father was speaking to him from beyond the grave, and he felt compelled to do more for his father’s salvation.<sup>15</sup>

Not long after rediscovering the letter, in an April 1890 meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve, Marion spoke up about some of the feelings he had regarding his deceased father. One account recorded that Marion “felt very anxious to do something for his father who had died out of the Church. He had labored very hard and for years before he succeeded in releasing his own mother from the errors into which she had fallen by the teaching of his father in regard to spiritualism. He had succeeded in winning nearly all the family back to the Church. But he wept in talking of his father.” After Marion shared such personal feelings about his father, Lorenzo Snow, who was then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, stood and offered words of comfort. President Snow, who had been intimately acquainted with Amasa as they served together for years in the Twelve, said that he had actually been thinking about Amasa the night before and “felt convinced in his own mind that Amasa would be permitted to associate [in the next life] with the Prophet Joseph to whom he was a true and devoted friend during his life.” President Snow said that the Lord had the ultimate say in the matter, but he believed if Amasa

“paid the penalty of his sins” then “he would be rewarded for his good deeds.”<sup>16</sup> No doubt this response thrilled Marion.

But despite President Snow’s comforting thoughts, no immediate action was taken to rebaptize and restore the blessings of Amasa. At the time, there were four members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve still living from the time of Amasa’s excommunication thirteen years earlier, including Lorenzo Snow. It’s possible that their feelings were still too tender and their memories too fresh to consider Marion’s request. The inaction, however, did not stop Marion from raising the issue from time to time. He was determined to rebaptize his father.

In an April 1894 meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, President Wilford Woodruff revealed a major change in policy regarding sealing ordinances in the temple. Previously men and women were sealed in father-child relationships to men who were not necessarily part of their family. This became known as the “law of adoption.” But in the April 1894 meeting President Woodruff told his fellow Apostles that he would announce a change the next day at general conference that every man and woman should be adopted to his own parents if possible. You can imagine the impact this announcement had on Marion, who sat quietly in the meeting thinking about his own father. When President Woodruff finished his remarks, Marion stood and said that he “wanted to do the work for the redemption of his father as soon as the First Presidency felt it would be right for him to do so.”<sup>17</sup> Once again, however, the decision to restore Amasa’s blessings was tabled for the time being, and Marion patiently waited.

Marion wasn’t alone in trying to redeem his father. In about 1899, his half-sister Martha experienced a remarkable dream in which she said Amasa appeared to her and pled for help. In the dream, Amasa told Martha that there was a great chasm separating him from his family in the spirit world, and he instructed her to share the dream with Marion, who he believed was in a position to help as a General Authority in the Church. Sometime after her dream, Marion stayed with Martha while traveling on Church business, and she shared the dream with him. Sometime after that, Marion had his own spiritual experience with his father requesting his temple work be completed.

Still, it wasn’t until May 1908, five years after Marion became the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, that he broached the subject again with President Joseph F. Smith, as the two of them traveled to Oak City, Utah, on Church business. Marion wrote, “I told President Smith of my dream and my sister Martha’s, how father had appeared to us and pled his cause. President Smith told me that there was no doubt but that father would come out all right in the end.” Then Marion made a direct and formal request. He wrote, “I told him I wanted to be baptized for father and then to have President Smith put his hands on my head and restore father’s former blessings upon me for him. President Smith said he would consider the matter with his counselors and had no doubt but it would be all right and he would do as I wished.”<sup>18</sup>

The long-awaited day finally arrived for Marion on January 12, 1909—his birthday. Marion met with the First Presidency and several members of the Twelve in the Salt Lake Temple to perform the ordinances for his father. Marion acted as his father’s proxy, being baptized by John Henry Smith of the Twelve and confirmed by President Joseph F. Smith. Marion wrote of the occasion, “They renewed and sealed upon me for father all his former blessings received under the hands of the priesthood in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on condition that he is prepared for them and accepts them. This performance has been one I have all these years looked forward to with fondest anticipation. On this point, my heart is

now quite satisfied, and I praise the name of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> This was quite the birthday present for Marion. In fact, he immediately left the temple and went to the home of his son, Francis M. Lyman Jr., where family members threw him a birthday celebration. I can only imagine the joy he felt on that January day. Perhaps Anthon H. Lund, who was a counselor in the First Presidency and present in the temple for the rebaptism, said it best in his journal that night: “Francis M. Lyman is the happiest man in town.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, 1867, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. [note: this collection is closed]

<sup>2</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, 1867, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Loretta L. Hefner, “From Apostle to Apostate: The Personal Struggle of Amasa Mason Lyman,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 98.

<sup>4</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, 1867, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>5</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, 1867, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>6</sup> As cited in Loretta L. Hefner, “From Apostle to Apostate: The Personal Struggle of Amasa Mason Lyman,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 98–99.

<sup>7</sup> As cited in Edward Leo Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman: Mormon Apostle and Apostate* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), 391.

<sup>8</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, May 7, 1870, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>9</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, May 8, 1870, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>10</sup> Scott H. Partridge, ed., *Thirteenth Apostle: The Diaries of Amasa M. Lyman, 1832–1877* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2016), 614.

<sup>11</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, May 9, 1870, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>12</sup> See Amasa M. Lyman Collection, MS 829, Box 4, Folder 12, Image 30 and 31.

<sup>13</sup> See Amasa M. Lyman Collection, MS 829, Box 4, Folder 12, Image 30 and 31.

<sup>14</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, January–February 1877, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>15</sup> As cited in Albert R. Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman: Trailblazer and Pioneer from the Atlantic to the Pacific* (1957), 248; See also Edward Leo Lyman, ed., *Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889–1895* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010), 29.

<sup>16</sup> See Edward Leo Lyman, ed., *Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889–1895* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010), 84–85.

<sup>17</sup> See Edward Leo Lyman, ed., *Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889–1895* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010), 490–491.

<sup>18</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, May 7, 1908, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>19</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, January 12, 1909, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>20</sup> Francis M. Lyman Journal, January 12, 1909, CR 929 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.